OPINION

BY HASSAN KAMAL WATTOO

Judicial discontent

JUDGES in Pakistan are not popular right now. I was reminded of this when I spent an hour defending them on camera recently. It was for a podcast, where I'd been invited to talk about the 26th Amendment and wanted to laser focus on what I view as its most important and least understood feature — impact on regular citizens. The brutal attack on our individual liberties. The drastically reduced likelihood that we will ever see justice if we are wronged by powerful people. The fact that you and I and our future generations are less free because of it. I argued that all of this is an inevitable result of crippling the independence of the judiciary, so this amendment must be undone.

Most of the feedback was kind, but I tend to be more interested in critique, and noticed a sizeable one building up in the comment section. It's a common argument that goes along these lines — 'why should I care? What have these judges ever done for me? What shining beacons of justice were they lighting before getting defanged, that I'm now supposed to mourn being extinguished? They toppled prime ministers and legitimised dictators, failed the country at every critical juncture, behaved less like guardians of justice and more like unelected holier-than-thou despots, and now, after all of that, you expect me to rise up in their defence?'

It's a view that seems rooted in trauma. There's clearly a degree of schadenfreude involved too — the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others, particularly those you dislike. And while I view it as fatally flawed and firmly disagree with it, this view is widely held and deserves to be addressed with clarity and fairness.

For a start, it is built on two factually incorrect premises. The first is that the judiciary has done nothing for us. You could have countless critiques of all the times it fell short. I do too, and so do several sitting and former judges of the Supreme Court. But at its best, it has fulfilled a function that no one else in this country could dream of — keeping the powerful in check. That Pervez Musharraf did not rule over us till the grave is a testament to this fact. So too is the legacy of judges like A.R. Cornelius and Dorab Patel. It was a pre-amendment judiciary that banned the trial of civilians in military courts with a robust and well-reasoned judgement, and a post-amendment constitutional bench that overturned it on flimsy grounds of technicality.

Secondly, there is no proverbial candy that the judiciary once enjoyed and has been snatched away, that I am now arguing to be returned. In fact, the post-amendment political system has gone to great lengths to appease judges at taxpayer expense. Salaries and privileges have risen. The number of judges enjoying these privileges has increased in both the Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court. The courts theoretically maintain the same powers now as they did before (except for the suo motu). What has changed is that power has been taken away from certain judges. Specifically, those not added to a constitutional bench (by a commission dominated by ruling party politicians) can no longer decide constitutional cases.

What this means is that if you're the kind of judge who likes to enjoy the grandeurs of high office and isn't concerned with trivial things like integrity and impartiality, this amendment is a dream come true. All you must do is ensure the government is happy with you, present yourself as predictable and well-behaved, and enjoy your steady stream of rewards and promotions. The only judge aggrieved with this arrangement is the kind with the integrity and willingness to do their job, even if it means occasionally upsetting whoever is currently in power. And even then, they are condemned to silence.

> What's changed is that power has been taken away from certain judges.

Almost all critiques of our judiciary are rooted in demonstrable lapses in its independence. For those critiques to manifest into taking away what little independence it had left is nothing short of a joke. As self-defeating as riding alone through a desert, getting irritated at the slow gait of your horse, and deciding that the appropriate remedy is to shoot it in the head — because that would surely teach it a lesson. Maybe this is why those who passed the 26th Amendment don't seem interested in defending it on the merits. They'd rather move on, present it as the status quo, and even double down with another fresh hell in the form of the 27th.

If all of this seems bleak, it's because it is. This en masse assault on our freedoms was designed to feel overwhelming, irreversible, and confusing. And even if there's not a lot we can do about it, we can at least be honest with ourselves. For our own sake. I'm not asking you to defend men in robes. I'm asking you to defend yourself. ■

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BY RAFIULLAH KAKAR

Port drawbacks

PAKISTAN reportedly floated a $1.2 billion plan for a deep-sea port at Pasni to export critical minerals from Balochistan. Though unconfirmed, the idea appears to have been discussed with US firms, including Missouri-based US Strategic Metals, which recently signed an MoU with the FWO on mineral refining and exports. With the government courting the Trump administration via "strategic resource diplomacy," some official interest is plausible. But the proposal demands rigorous scrutiny.

The commercial case for another deep-sea port in Balochistan is, at best, tenuous. While both Pasni and Gwadar possess the natural depth required for large cargo vessels, this natural advantage is offset by their peripheral location, weak hinterland connectivity, and negligible commercial traffic. These constraints make them less competitive than the ports of Karachi, Port Qasim, and Iran's Bandar Abbas.

Gwadar offers a cautionary tale. Despite two decades of infrastructural investments and plans, it remains largely idle. Pakistani importers prefer Karachi and Port Qasim, even at the cost of higher demurrage charges and longer clearance times. While proponents can argue for the potential of Pasni (and Gwadar) to function as exit points for mineral exports and as entrep ts for trans-shipment trade, even this narrower role faces technical and political obstacles.

The first is the absence of reliable connectivity between the mineral-rich Chagai region and the Makran coast. At present, road transport between Chagai and Gwadar can take up to 15 hours, traversing routes that are neither designed nor maintained for heavy cargo traffic. This is why Chinese companies operating in Saindak currently rely on Karachi port rather than Gwadar. The only serious option to make either port commercially viable for bulk mineral exports is a new rail corridor linking Nokundi to Gwadar or Pasni, but this is a highly expensive proposition. Pakistan has made repeated efforts to convince Barrick Gold to finance the proposed railway infrastructure, but the company has shown little enthusiasm so far. Even if American firms were inclined to invest in such a railway, on the assumption of long-term mineral revenues, this would only solve the technical problem of poor connectivity. The security and political challenges are far more intractable.

Balochistan is currently experiencing the longest wave of insurgency in its history. Grievances over the extraction of natural resources without local benefit or meaningful local participation remain a central driver of this conflict. These resentments have been exacerbated by the incumbent provincial government's recent Minerals Act, widely viewed locally as a rollback of the hard-won gains of provincial autonomy. Launching another mega-extraction project in this context, without prior political reconciliation, is likely to deepen rather than resolve the ongoing conflict.

The experience of CPEC illustrates this. CPEC was rolled out amidst an active insurgency without prior peacebuilding initiatives. Islamabad's militarised approach, marked by increased checkpoints and movement restrictions, undermined local livelihoods and, in the eyes of the common Baloch, delegitimised the project. The Chinese, initially indifferent to local political grievances, soon found themselves facing repeated insurgent attacks and a deteriorating security environment. Any American-led initiative that ignores these lessons risks repeating the same cycle, triggering militarisation and insurgent violence rather than sustainable development.

> The reported Pasni port proposal echoes a familiar pattern.

Beyond domestic politics, a US-backed Pasni port would reverberate across the region. Chinese and Iranian actors are unlikely to view the project with equanimity. For Beijing, a parallel American-led mineral export corridor a short distance away will be perceived as strategic encroachment. Given Pakistan's increasing financial and security dependence on China, there are clear limits to how far Islamabad can pursue 'balancing' between great China and the US without provoking geopolitical friction.

In short, the Pasni port proposal represents a familiar pattern: courting foreign investors while ignoring local grievances and the underlying political economy of conflict and exclusionthat has historically defined state-society relations in Balochistan.

Without transparency and meaningful local participation and ownership, such projects will remain both commercially fragile and politically explosive. Before courting another foreign power to build ports and railways, Islamabad must rethink its centralised, militarised, and extractive approachto development in Balochistan. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Local bodies polls

KARACHI: Prof Abdul Ghafoor Ahmed, MNA, said … that he will move a resolution during the current session of the National Assembly for the holding of local bodies elections throughout the country without further delay. In his presidential address at the concluding session of the … ex-municipal councillors' convention organised by Jamaat-i-Islami, he hoped that the Government will fulfil its constitutional obligation. Meanwhile, as an interim arrangement, ex-municipal councillors should be nominated to the Advisory Committees to run the affairs of the municipalities, he suggested. Prof Ghafoor also asked the ex-municipal councillors … to struggle for early local bodies elections. — Staff reporter

[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies from Beirut,] Prime Minister Rashid Karami … proposed a large-scale compromise aimed at ending the Lebanese civil war. In a nationwide broadcast he called for the Army to be given a role in restoring order, but also urged [for] political reform — thus accepting demands made by both sides in the … civil war. These steps should be followed up quickly with the handing in of weapons in the possession of … rival Left and Right-wing militias.

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Issue with Nepal ruler

NEW DELHI: Bharat's Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Patel, indicated here today [Nov 9] that the Government … could not accept the change of ruler in Nepal brought about two days ago. Addressing a public meeting Sardar Patel said: "Those who are wielding real power today in Nepal do not accept the King as head of the state. They have installed his 3-year-old grandson on the Throne. They want us to accept the position. How can we do so?"

Sardar Patel called upon the Bharati people to unite and strengthen themselves in face of "new dangers or fear of dangers" arising from trouble in Tibet and Nepal.

The internal feud in Nepal had laid wide-open Bharat's frontier in the north to outside danger, he said. Nobody could say what the outcome of Chinese action in Tibet would be but the use of force created more fear and tension, he added.

It was possible, Sardar Patel said, that when a country got drunk with its own military strength … it did not think calmly over all issues. But the use of arms was wrong and in the present state of world it might easily touch off a new world war which would mean disaster for … mankind. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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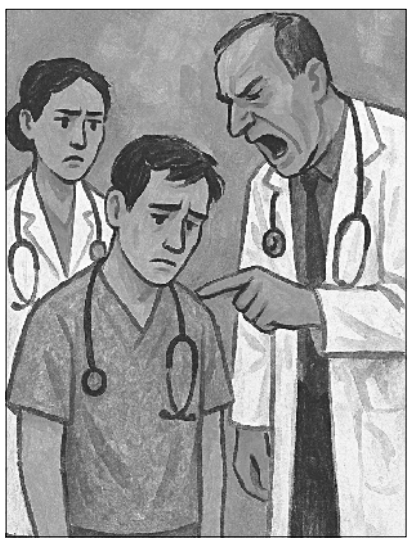
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Bullying is rampant in medical training



POSTGRADUATE residency is meant to shape young doctors into competent and confident professionals. Supervisors and unit heads are entrusted not only with the task of passing down technical skills, but also with modelling leadership, integrity and compassion. In Pakistan, however, too many residency programmes are marked by something far more corrosive: bullying disguised as teaching.

Across specialities — whether in general surgery, medicine, paediatrics, gynaecology or any other professional domain — the pattern is disturbingly consistent. Ward rounds often turn into public spectacles of humiliation. Operating theatres echo with shouting and ridicule. Residents are mocked in front of patients and colleagues. Mistakes, instead of becoming opportunities to learn, are punished with sarcasm or verbal abuse.

This is not about the odd 'difficult personality'. It is systemic. A generation of consultants, who once endured the same treatment, now perpetuate it, convinced that harshness produces 'tough' specialists.

But instead of resilience, this culture produces burnout, silence and fear. Trainees avoid asking questions lest they be ridiculed. Errors are hidden rather than openly discussed. Some residents, exhausted by humiliation, quietly consider abandoning the training altogether. Others seek training abroad, fuelling the ongoing brain drain.

The consequences extend beyond the wellbeing of doctors. Patients, too, are affected when their caregivers are trained in fear instead of support. A resident who hides mistakes to avoid reprimand, which happens frequently, endangers patient safety. A trainee too anxious to clarify a doubt risks repeating it in the wards. A system that normalises bullying ultimately fails the very people it is meant to serve.

Our institutions cannot just look away. The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) and the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP) bear the responsibility of ensuring that training environments meet both academic and ethical standards; just listing these objectives as part of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) is not enough.

Workplace harassment laws must be applied within hospitals, including wards and operating theatres. Hospitals should establish formal mechanisms for residents to report abuse without the fear of retaliation. Supervisors themselves should undergo structured training in mentorship, communication and leadership — not just bedside manners and surgical techniques.

Other countries have moved beyond this outdated sink-or-swim model. Structured teaching programmes, simulation-based trainings, and constructive feedback systems have proven that mutual respect strengthens doctors far more than intimidation ever can. Pakistan's surgical or medical training must evolve as well, or risk falling further behind, which sadly, it already has.

In case of surgery, it demands toughness, but toughness is not cruelty. A true mentor challenges without humiliating, corrects without crushing, and leads without demeaning. In the last five years since graduation, I have only seen one or two individuals who had these qualities.

If we want to produce physicians and surgeons who are both skilled and compassionate, we must break the toxic cycle of bullying in hospitals, and replace it with genuine and sustained mentorship. Our medical residents and, indeed, our patients deserve nothing less than that.

A. Rehman S.
Karachi

Decline of railways

UNFORTUNATELY, the existence of Pakistan Railways has been practically limited to the province of Punjab, while in the rest of the country, especially in Sindh and Balochistan, railway stations, infrastructure and even residential quarters meant for railway employees have been occupied by individuals having nothing to do with the railways.

As for the services, people are forced to travel by road instead of cost-efficient railways because the entire system is seriously unpredictable in terms of efficiency and time management. The transportation of vegetables, grains and fruits costs the local population of both the provinces very highly because private transporters charge heavily.

The relevant authorities and provincial assemblies should take up the matter and fulfil their responsibilities with respect to the revival of efficient railways or yore.

Mansoor ul Haque Solangi
Karachi

Rebuilding civility

BASIC civility, the simple art of treating others with respect, speaking kindly and showing patience, has truly vanished from society. Walk through a crowded street or a government office and you will see people yelling and pushing each other.

Even classrooms are turning into spaces of defiance and ego. Somewhere along the way, we stopped seeing politeness as strength, and started confusing aggression with confidence. This collapse of manners is not unique to Pakistan, but it feels sharper here.

Sociologists call civility the invisible glue that holds a society together. When that glue weakens, trust falls apart, and when trust disappears, fairness becomes a myth. Political turmoil, economic anxiety and constant frustration have eaten away at our sense of social balance.

You can see the evidence everywhere: talk shows that reward shouting over substance, political debates that rely on insults rather than ideas, and social media outrage that has become a national sport.

Rudeness now feels normal. Many people even defend it by saying they

are just being straightforward. The erosion of manners begins at home. Families have changed dramatically. Parents are busier, weighed down by economic pressures or lost in their phones. Education has not filled this gap either. Culture has changed, too.

There used to be a shared sense of accountability; out of mutual respect, not out of fear. Economic stress only adds to the decline. When people are constantly struggling to survive, good manners start to feel like a luxury.

Rebuilding civility does not require a national campaign. It starts with ordinary choices: speak softly even when you are angry, listen before you reply, say thank you even when you do not have to. These gestures seem small, but they are the seeds of a better society. Good manners have nothing to do with status or education; they are about recognising the dignity of another human being.

What Pakistan needs most urgently is not just infrastructure made of concrete, but a moral infrastructure built on empathy and respect.

We live in an age of speed and uncertainty, caught between the pull of tradition and the push of modern life. The way we speak to a waiter, disagree with a colleague, or argue on social media platforms shows what kind of society we are becoming.

If we want Pakistani society to be kinder, wiser and more humane in texture, we will have to begin with something simple: learn once again to be polite.

Dr Muhammad Anwar Farooq
Rahim Yar Khan

Demeaning roles

ONE is not aware as to why the young female artists in television dramas are assigned roles where they are frequently slapped, insulted, taunted, abused, accused, harassed and maltreated by their family members, especially in-laws, in the name of honour, dowry, infertility, infidelity, adultery and inheritance.

It seems that the story writers, producers and directors have run out of new ideas, creativity and originality. The plots of old dramas are being re-enacted with slight modifications in the script and change of characters.

What surprises me the most is how the female artists tolerate and opt for such demeaning roles where they are the victims of misbehaviour, arrogance, hatred, jealousy and prejudices based on their gender.

Why do they not stand up and refuse to act in such roles? In fact, where is the civil society and forums that are always in the forefront of any fight related to women's cause?

Private TV channels make the play more melodramatic by dragging mothers in negative roles. In a soap opera running these days, two of the mothers are shown as evil conspirators. In the first 30 odd episodes of most TV soaps, the evil forces have an upper hand, but towards the end, when the damage has already been inflicted, the bad people surrender and seek forgiveness. All this is being projected in the name of entertainment.

In our part of the world, mothers have always been presented as exemplary role models for others. Never in my adult life have I witnessed the shallow, shabby, distorted image of mothers that is being presented in TV dramas. What lessons are we trying to convey to the children?

Khaled
Islamabad

▶ **CRITICAL THINKING:** In our institutions, teachers often focus more on marks and grades rather than developing students' critical thinking skills. This puts pressure on students to memorise the syllabus instead of learning to think deeply or creatively. Critical thinking is just as important as academic performance, but unfortunately, it is not emphasised in our education system. If our institutions truly want to prepare students to perform well — both in thinking and in achieving good grades — they must give equal importance to critical thinking. It helps students in understanding the world beyond textbooks.
Aqsa Hashmi
Turbat

▶ **SKILL BUILDING:** Pakistan is facing a silent crisis in the shape of the widening gap between education and employability. Each year, thousands of graduates step into the job market with degrees, but without practical abilities. Skills are now shaping the modern world. In Pakistan, vocational training institutions lack adequate funding, modern tools and the trust of parents and students. However, other countries have shown how strong vocational training can transform national productivity. Schools should teach technical subjects, vocational training centres must partner with industries, and parents should encourage hands-on professions.
Hafiz Muhammad Abubakar Nadeem
Muzaffargarh

▶ **WATER MANAGEMENT:** Pakistan ranks among the most water-stressed countries globally. The root of the problem lies not just in climate change, but in poor management. We continue to rely on antiquated, highly inefficient irrigation techniques, resulting in massive water wastage in agriculture, which consumes over 90 per cent of fresh water resources. Urban centres lack effective infrastructure for rainwater harvesting and wastewater treatment. Local governments should prioritise the development of wastewater treatment plants to recycle water for industrial and domestic uses other than drinking. We cannot afford to wait for the next drought to hit us.
Bisma Kibriya
Rawalpindi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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